

The Westing Game: Anniversary Edition

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For twenty-five years, Ellen Raskin's Newbery Medal-winning *The Westing Game* has been an enduring favorite and is now being reissued with a brand-new jacket by Kevin Hawkes and an introduction by Ann Durell.

This highly inventive mystery involves sixteen people who are invited to the reading of Samuel W. Westing's will. They could become millionaires, depending on how they play the tricky and dangerous Westing game, which involves blizzards, burglaries, and bombings. Ellen Raskin has entangled a remarkable cast of characters in a puzzle-knotted, word-twisting plot filled with humor, intrigue, and suspense.

Ellen Raskin was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up during the Great Depression. She was the author of several novels, including the Newbery Medal-winning *The Westing Game*, the Newbery Honor-winning *Figgs & Phantoms*, *The Tattooed Potato* and other clues, and *The Mysterious Disappearance of Leon (I Mean Noel)*. She also wrote and illustrated many picture books and was an accomplished graphic artist. She designed dust jackets for dozens of books, including the first edition of Madeleine L'Engle's classic *A Wrinkle in Time*. Ms. Raskin died at the age of fifty-six on August 8, 1984, in New York City.

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Sunset Towers

The sun sets in the west (just about everyone knows that), but Sunset Towers faced east. Strange!

Sunset Towers faced east and had no towers. This glittery, glassy apartment house stood alone on the Lake Michigan shore five stories high. Five empty stories high.

Then one day (it happened to be the Fourth of July), a most uncommon-looking delivery boy rode around town slipping letters under the doors of the chosen tenants-to-be. The letters were signed Barney Northrup.

The delivery boy was sixty-two years old, and there was no such person as Barney Northrup. . . .

"In [The Westing Game] the author shows once more that no one can beat her at intrigue, at concocting marvelous absurdities."

-Publishers Weekly

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FOR JENNY who asked for a puzzle-mystery AND SUSAN K.

INTRODUCTION

Until 1970, Ellen Raskin was considered an illustrator, not an author, although she had written the texts of her notable picture books, such as *Nothing Ever Happens on My Block*; *And It Rained*; and *Spectacles*. And until 1969, I didn't really know her, although when I was the children's-book editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston, she had illustrated *Books: A Book to Begin On*, by Susan Bartlett, and *Come Along!*, by Rebecca Caudill—as well as doing for us some of the one thousand book jackets of which she was so proud.

Our friendship really began in the smoking car (like the title character of *Moe Q. McGlutch*, Ellen smoked too much) of a Pennsylvania Railroad train en route from New York to Philadelphia, where we were both speaking on a panel. I stopped to say hello, and she said, "I'm sitting here alone because I'm so nervous. I hate speaking." "I hate it, too," I said, "and I've given up smoking." In the depressed gloom that followed this exchange, the beginning of a bond was formed.

That same year I moved from Holt to E. P. Dutton. Their office was located at Union Square and Seventeenth Street, only a short walk from Ellen's apartment on Eighth Street, and we got together more often. One day, Ellen confided that she had always wanted to adapt *Goblin Market*, by Christina Rossetti, as a picture-book text. I thought of the lavishly rich visual details of the poem, and I longed to see how she would illustrate it. "Would you do the book for me?" I asked. "Yes," she answered. "Jean [Jean Karl, her editor at Atheneum] doesn't want it." Ellen was always candid. So she did do it—her first book for Dutton. One of her exquisitely intricate paintings for that book now hangs on my wall.

We often talked about our lives, and I particularly loved stories about her family and how she and her parents and sister drove around the country during the Great Depression so her father could look for work, an epic safari that took them from Milwaukee to California. "You should write a book about growing up in the Depression," I told her.

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